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H75

Holt, Dr. Samuel L.

The Alamance regulators.



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Book H15

civil office with pay. He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1865, and to all subsequent State Conventions of the Conservative and Democratic parties. He was elected member of the National Democratic Executive Committee for South Carolina, in 1876. In 1877, with Gen. Kershaw and others, he was sent to Washington as a member of the Hampton committee. For a long while, he was chairman of the board of trustees of the Mount Zion Institute, and a member of the board of trustees of South Carolina College.

He was, in the Masonic lodge, Worshipful Master of the Grand Lodge and High Priest of the chapter, and thrice Illustrious Grand Master in the Council; he was also Knight of the Red Cross; Knight of Malta; and Knight Templar; and once District Deputy Grand Master of Odd Fellows. He was general counsellor of the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Railroad; general solicitor of the Wilmington, Columbia and Augusta Railroad, and advising counsel of several railroad companies; solicitor of the National Bank of Winnsboro, and attorney for the town council of Winnsboro.

In private life, Colonel Rion was quiet, liberal, and charitable. Many of the Confederate widows and orphans were grateful recipients of his liberality and kindness. In his business life, he was systematic and punctual, with a somewhat reserved disposition.

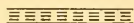
Shortly after his graduation, Colonel Rion married Miss Weir, a daughter of Samuel Weir, an old Columbia journalist. At his death he left five daughters and three sons, one of whom, Mr. Preston Rion, to whose kindness I am indebted for much of the above information, is at present postmaster at Winnsboro.

Although Colonel Rion was under the patronage of John C. Calhoun and Wm. C. Preston, he worked out his own success, exhibiting a perseverance and determination fully in keeping with his great intellect.

Since 1854, his home had been in Winnsboro, where he gained for himself an abiding place in the hearts of all with whom he was associated.

In commemoration of his grand intellect, excellent virtues, and many noble achievements, shall it not be said of him that, though he is dead, yet has he left

"A lofty name,
A light, a landmark on the cliffs of fame."



THE ALAMANCE REGULATORS.

[This article was written for the Raleigh "*Standard*" in 1857, by Dr. Samuel L. Holt, of Graham, N. C. For some reason, it was not given to the publishers, but was left in a drawer in the drug store of Dr. Wm. A. Holt, a nephew of the author, and for many years the beloved physician of Davidson. It has been carefully preserved in Dr. Holt's family, to whom we are indebted for its use.—EDITOR.]

The Editors of the Standard:

There is perhaps nothing new in the exposé, but it embodies the facts in a shape a little different from those heretofore given to the public. If you think it worthy of a place in your columns, you can publish it, if not, suppress it.

A name will not add to its merits, (if it have any) nor will the absence of one detract from it. One who is not anxious to figure in a newspaper will nevertheless abide by the statements here made, because they are supposed to be founded on truth.

Very respectfully,

I lately passed over the Regulation battle ground. It is eight miles southwest from the town of Graham, in Alamance (then Orange) County, and on the road from Hillsboro, by Bell's Mill, to Salisbury.

The ground, in 1771, was sparsely covered with trees. It is now nearly all cleared, and the face of the country, (a

high tableland between the North and South branches of the great Alamance) can be seen in almost every direction.

The causes which led to that event, after the lapse of 86 years, and after the mists of interest, prejudice, passion, family name and influence have passed away, can be calmly and distinctly viewed at every point.

It is a matter of regret that the earlier historians were not better informed of the facts and circumstances connected with the origin and progress of the contests of the people in North Carolina with the Royal Government, from 1765 to 1771.

Judge Marshall, in his history of the American Colonies, calls the movement of the Regulators an insurrection of a set of ignorant people who were dissatisfied with the Fee Bill.

He, no doubt, derived his information from the Governor's proclamations, the judges, or the lawyers, who usually regard heavy fees as the very quintessence of justice and law.

The later writers have embodied more facts, and have therefore more truth and fairness in their accounts of the transactions of that period; but have spoiled the correctness and force of the story by their mode of telling the tale—by the introduction of some ill-timed attempts at wit, or by a fulsome eulogy upon some favorite person, doctrine, or theory by the wayside.

"An honest tale speeds best when plainly told." The legislative and executive power was virtually vested in the Governor and Council. The ministerial officers were appointed by the Governor, and therefore under his control.

The judges were overshadowed by him, and in a great measure dependent upon him.

We have a melancholy instance of this in the fate of Judge Berry, who had the firmness and integrity to do his duty on the Bench, but not the moral courage to face a

man who had hoped and expected to overawe him by his power and place. The courts were few and far between, and totally insufficient to do the business of the Colonists, the distance and the expense of attending them amounting almost to a denial of justice to men of ordinary means.

The taxes were onerous to a people who had but little money and needed but little. Their wants were supplied by a country abounding with game and the fruits of a rich virgin soil.

The law, when justly and faithfully administered, was the only master they acknowledged, and the tax was cheerfully paid when in strict accordance with it.

Government, as they understood it, was made for the benefit of the governed, and deserved neither the respect nor obedience of the subjects, when it ceased to perform its legitimate functions, and became an engine of oppression.

The Clerks of the Courts made out extraordinary and illegal bills of costs against suitors, and charged exorbitant fees for all business connected with their offices.

The Sheriffs extorted from the people a much larger sum than the law authorized. Their property was seized to gratify the rapacity of these minions of power, and their persons insulted by these self-constituted despots, (the Governor and his creatures sharing the spoils.)

It was the duty of the courts to prevent and punish such outrages, of the Attorney General to prosecute such offenders. Duty and justice were disregarded, and the evil continued.

After having applied in vain to the courts, the people determined to try the moral power of numbers. They formed themselves into an association, called Regulators, and held their first great mass meeting at Maddock's Mill.

There they set forth and promulgated the very principles embodied in our Declaration of Rights.

1. The right to meet and consult for the common good.

2. The right to inquire into the accounts of public officers.
3. The right to be taxed only by their own consent.
4. The right to a fair trial by jury.
5. The right to a fair administration of the criminal laws.
6. The right, particularly, to prosecute and punish corrupt judges, clerks, sheriffs, etc.

They petitioned the Governor repeatedly to execute the law, and bring offenders to justice. He at first promised to visit their courts, enquire into the ground of their complaints, and correct abuses.

He came, and his minion, Edmund Fanning, was indicted for corruption and malpractice in office.

He pleaded guilty, was fined *nothing*, and continued in office to prey upon them. And he continued to prey upon them. Such hypocrisy and duplicity was insufferable; but they continued their appeals to the executive, and suffered long before they took the power into their own hands. Finally, after having done all that loyalty demanded, they went into the court house at Hillsboro, and the Judge found it convenient to discontinue the farce that had been played long enough. He, the Clerk, the Sheriff, and perhaps other officers of the Court ought to have thanked the clemency of the Regulators that they did not figure as did Pugh, Merrill, and others, who died at the rope's end a year or two afterwards, under *iuridico* Executive Justice and Mercy, under the sword of a villian upon the bench and tyrant in the field. This may seem strong language, but it is nevertheless true.

Governor Tryon, instead of purging the courts of justice and protecting the people against these high-handed, arrogant plunderers, (as a great and good man would have done) became their accomplice, their aider, abettor, and supporter. He, no doubt, pocketed a portion of the judi-

cial robbery, and temporized so as to prevent the arming and military organization of the sufferers.

He dreaded a rifle in the hands of a backwoods hunter, and his policy was to keep powder and lead out of their reach. He procured the pretended enactment of statutes against mobs, riots, and treason, to prevent public meetings and keep the people from acting in concert.

After all these legislative, judicial, and civil appliances had been resorted to in vain, he decided to draw the sword. Public opinion, he knew, was against him, but the awful and sublime doctrine that "the King can do no wrong" he relied upon. He issued his proclamation to all lovers of order and good government (the usual style) to rally to his standard and put down the rebels.

He found men enough, among the aristocracy of the East, ready, from interest or ambition, to follow him, but immortal honor is due to the little county of Duplin. They not only refused to take up arms against their fellow-countrymen, but afterwards refused to take the oath of allegiance, coined by Tryon for the occasion.

Strange indeed is it that John Ashe could defy the Government to execute the Stamp Act, and yet follow Tryon to slaughter his fellow subjects for resisting unjust taxation.

It is idle to attempt a palliation or excuse by calling the Regulators ignorant rioters, or a misguided mob. Governor Martin afterwards admitted that they were grievously wronged, and it is certain that Caswell and Ashe knew it.

At the last hour, the Regulators sent a petition to Governor Tryon, begging him to redress their grievances and prevent the effusion of blood.

He required them to lay down their arms and surrender unconditionally to him, his harpies, and blood-hounds. This they refused to do, knowing that they had justice and right on their side. Tryon's followers knew it too, and hence their hesitation to fire upon the Regulators.

The principles upon which their cause was bottomed were precisely those of the Revolution. It was in fact the beginning of the Revolution, and had they been seconded as they ought to been, by the whole province, it is a very rational presumption that few Tories or Loyalists would have afterward appeared in North Carolina. Tryon's party was the Royalist party. It was the Tory party. The Regulators were the Whig party of that day. As is usual in such cases, when the Boston Regulation, or insurrection, broke out, many of them changed sides. Some of Tryon's leaders raised the banner that the Regulators had dyed in their blood. Some of the Regulators became loyalists, because many of their party had lost their lives and property in resisting the Royal Government. The first rising having proved a failure, how could they confide in the second?

My purpose is to do justice to all concerned. The divine right of kings or of a military aristocracy was never recognized here, was never engrafted upon, and permitted to grow upon our soil. The great error of the distinguished men who followed Tryon to battle was their weakness in permitting themselves to be made use of as instruments to enforce his unholy design. Some of them afterwards made atonement as far as they could for the blood they had shed in Alamance by battling for their country's rights nobly, manfully.

The misfortune of the Regulators was that they were not headed by some of the prominent civil and military leaders of the Province. They were made up of the substantial yeomen of the country, who had felt the heel of oppression and the iron grasp of power.

Distant counties and provinces of the Colony (such as is always the case in despotic governments,) were the theatre of heavy exactions to pamper pride and office.

The proof is undisputed and indisputable. The sheriff was the right arm of the court, the clerk, his master

scribe. Backed by the awful dignity of the Bench, these villians knew whom they could assail with impunity.

The means of education were limited ; they had no newspapers or printing presses to vindicate their rights ; but many of them could read and write. They understood what civil and religious liberty meant. They knew what law and justice was. They could appreciate freedom and equality. They saw the lordly aristocrats of the land favored and fattened, and themselves trampled under foot. They saw money filched from their purses to build gubernatorial palaces, and to feed clerks, sheriffs, and constables without their consent. They saw that justice was put up to sale and that the longest purse was sure to win. They saw that government was a curse rather than a blessing—furnishing nothing but pretexts for levying contributions upon them.

Notwithstanding all this, when they refused to surrender their rights as British subjects, they were denounced as ignorant and lawless. Had they been sustained, as every principle of virtue and patriotism required, North Carolina would have had the credit of opening the Seven Years Campaign for Independence.

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It is hoped that some one having the ability and industry will collect the material for a full and complete civil, judicial, and ecclesiastical history of the Old North State, and put it in such a shape as to present a true narrative of the settlement and the management of the Colony down to the Revolution.



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